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GAO Doubtful On Endowment For Democracy

The Endowment for Democracy is off on a quixotic crusade to spread the good word about democracy throughout the world—with a multimillion-dollar purse from the taxpayers.

Despite its laudable purpose, the endowment appears to be spreading more controversy than democracy. A still-secret draft report by the General Accounting Office raises questions about the endowment's operations and responsibilities that were left unanswered when it was rather haphazardly created last year.

The GAO noted, for example, that U.S. ambassadors expressed serious doubts that the endowment would be allowed to function in certain countries where it would seem to be needed most. They also feared it would duplicate existing programs and might conflict with U.S. foreign policy. One task force concluded that "a new U.S. program to aid democracy abroad was not needed."

My associate Donald Goldberg has been investigating whether the endowment is worth the \$31 million it is trying to pry from the taxpayers. Here are his findings:

- Some of the projects funded by the endowment look suspiciously like high-priced junkets, not serious attempts to spread the gospel of democracy.

The endowment dispatched one bipartisan delegation of earnest do-gooders to the Caribbean and Europe. Did the apostles of freedom visit countries where some enlightenment on the principles of democracy is sorely needed? Not on your life.

They went to Jamaica, where the beaches are inviting, the people free and the government already democratic. They also stopped by such solidly democratic capitals as Stockholm, Brussels and Paris. The delegation even brought the message of democracy to Geneva, capital of the world's oldest democracy.

- According to the draft GAO report, some projects discussed by the endowment's supporters are already being funded by other agencies.

• Though the endowment got a grant from the U.S. Information Agency, it haughtily informed USIA officials that it would not be accountable to them for the money.

• At least \$20,000 of endowment money was spent to help pro-government candidates in the recent elections in Panama. Another \$2 million was proposed for the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute, whose director, Irving Brown, has been identified by former CIA em-

ployees as having done undercover work for the agency. These expenditures have raised suspicions that the endowment may be a front for the CIA.

Footnote: Brown denies he has ever worked for the CIA.